

The Knights of the Snowshoe: A Study of the Evolution of Sport in Nineteenth Century Montreal

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Softly, silently, like the snow flakes upon which they trod, with the peculiar roll of the shoulders and jogging of the hips went the band of athletes, the livid torches illuminating their picturesque costumes, their bright turbans, their fleecy bashilisks and their cerulean tuques. Tramp, tramp like the stroke of fate went their webbed foot-falls.¹

More descriptive of some nocturnal fantasy than a torchlight procession of Montreal snowshoers welcoming Lord Dufferin to the city in 1873, this passage hints at the pageantry of and civic respect for the relatively unheralded sport of snowshoeing. The modern stereotype of the nature and meaning of the activity associated with snowshoeing is couched in aboriginal origins and the utilitarian functions of the device as an implement for winter transport and/or hunting. References to snowshoeing history in modern books are brief and incomplete² while scholarly works contain only scant mention of snowshoeing.³

The purpose of this paper is to describe and critically examine the evolution of showshoeing as a sport within Montreal during the period from 1840 to 1890. Snowshoeing played a leading role in the organization of sport in Montreal which was the epicentre of nineteenth century Canadian sport.⁴ Only lacrosse (and much later, ice hockey) exceeded the total number of urban snowshoe clubs.⁵ In particular, it was the example derived from the Montreal Snow Shoe

* The author wishes to express his sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and the *JSH* editor for their professional expertise, time and suggestions given toward the completion of this article.

1. *Montreal Gazette*, January 16, 1873.

2. See, for example, Gerry Wolfram. *Walk Into Winter: A Complete Snowshoeing and Winter Camping Guide* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Canada, Ltd. 1977). pp. 9-14, or, Gerard Lortie, *LaRaquette* (Montreal: Editions du Jour, 1972).

3. These works include: Alan Metcalfe, "Organized Sport and Social Stratification in Montreal, 1840-1901," in *Canadian Sport: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. R. S. Gruneau and J. G. Albinson (Don Mills: Addison-Wesley (Canada) Ltd. 1976), pp. 77-101; Don Morrow, "The Powerhouse of Canadian Sport: The Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, Inception to 1909," *Journal of Sport History* 8 (Winter. 1981): 20-39; and Don Morrow, *A Sporting Evolution, The Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, 1881-1981* (Montreal: Graphics Group, 1981), pp. 14-36. In addition, three doctoral dissertations, completed at The University of Alberta, refer to events in the history of snowshoeing. These studies by Lindsay, Cox and Jones are referred to in this paper.

4. S. F. Wise and D. Fisher. "Montreal" in *Canada's Sporting Heroes: Their Lives and Times* (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co. Ltd., 1974). pp. 13-26.

5. Metcalfe reported that the number of snowshoe clubs in Montreal alone was 7 in 1871, 15 in 1877, 20 in 1881. Between 1881 and 1894, the number of clubs fluctuated between 16 and 22. See A. Metcalfe, "The Evolution

Club's activities that set many patterns in the development of the various aspects of the sport. As Lindsay accurately noted for the period prior to 1867, "a history of snowshoeing in Canada is virtually a history of snowshoeing in



The Snowshoers' Arch constructed in 1878 to welcome British royalty to Montreal. Source: M.S.S.C. Scrapbook, 1878-1885 (published as an artist's sketch in the *London Graphic*).

of Organized Physical Recreation in Montreal, 1840-1895, "Histoire Sociale-Social History, 11 (May 1978): 149. In the Montreal Snow Shoe Club, active members numbered 300 in 1878, 550 in 1884, and 1100 in 1886. Annual Reports of the Montreal Snow Shoe Club, 1876 to 1886. (Unpublished reports contained in the files of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, National Archives, Ottawa, Canada).

Montreal, and, in particular, the Montreal Snow Shoe Club.⁶ Thus, this study focuses especially upon the Montreal Snow Shoe Club (M.S.S.C.) for a fifty year period during which sport in general moved from preindustrial to industrial form(s). There is no intent in the paper to develop distinct criteria for this industrial transition process; rather the intent is to discuss the changes as they were manifested in/by snowshoeing.⁷

This study analyzes the changes that affected the development of an urban-based, single sport during a significant half century in the growth of organized sport in Canada. The focused examination on snowshoeing provides a window through which the changes from a pre-industrial to an industrial sport can be traced. Three phases or periods of transition were identified as a framework for analysis: a) the 1840s through to 1866, which was the era when the sport originated; b) 1867 to 1879 when there was a distinct shift to industrial, organized sport that can be traced through such developmental categories as gambling, a competitive racing emphasis, racial discrimination, the codification of laws or rules and attendant standardization and the emergence of a distinct ethos of snowshoeing; and c) 1880 to 1895 when contrived events such as concerts, winter carnivals and tradition perpetuated snowshoeing until its ultimate anglophone decline in the midst of the emergence of team sports. Finally, the study gives special attention to the structural and functional parameters of the sport as they underwent change over the fifty year period.

I

The origins of snowshoeing are aboriginal. The conventional snowshoe of the North American Indian was constructed from hardwood and interwoven with leather thongs and known as the "beaver tail" for its resemblance in shape to that part of the beaver. To help negotiate mountainous and rough terrain, the shape of the snowshoe was almost round.⁸ Coureurs de bois, Nor'Westers, military units and white men living in the bush must have found the snowshoe indispensable for winter use. However, except in the form of impromptu challenges in the very early years of the development of snowshoeing, there is very little evidence that these groups contributed to the sport. In fact, there is no record of white men adopting the snowshoe for recreational use until 1840. It was one of the few sports prior to Confederation that did not enjoy the leadership and organization provided by the omnipresent military garrison

6. Peter L. Lindsay, "A History of Sport in Canada, 1807-1867" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1969), p. 71.

7. The study relies heavily upon H. W. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club, Its History and Record with a Synopsis of the Racing Events of Other Clubs Throughout the Dominion, From 1840 to the Present Time* (Montreal: Becket Brothers. 1882). Becket was a member of the M.S.S.C. This 500-page volume is more a collection of information or a record of dates, facts, meetings, new clubs, social gatherings, athletes and rules than it is an account in any narrative sense. Without apology then, Becket's book forms the backbone of evidence for this paper. Yet, the Minute books, annual reports, scrapbooks and newspaper clippings relating to the M.S.S.C. and to Montreal snowshoeing were examined and used to validate Becket's work and to complement general newspaper research on the topic.

8. *Montreal Daily Star*, February 6, 1884. Normally, the snowshoe was from four to six feet in length and about twenty to twenty-four inches at the widest expanse of stringing.

officers.⁹ Instead, a group of twelve civilians “tramped” regularly on Saturday afternoons beginning in 1840 and they formally organized themselves through the election of club officers into the Montreal Snow Shoe Club (M.S.S.C.) three years later. The origin of the word tramp applied to snowshoeing is unknown, but it is aptly onomatopoeic in mimicking the sound of the webbed snowshoes impacting on fresh snow. Tramp connotes a measured, continuous and forcible tread of heavy footfalls and colloquially it also refers to a bout of “journeying on foot, a long, tiring and toilsome walk or march; a trudge, a walking excursion.”¹⁰ The term is not only apropos in sound but also in paramilitaristic meaning since tramps were conducted in very disciplined fashion.

The earliest disciples of the sport were drawn from the elite members of Montreal society.¹¹ Comparable in purpose to most Canadian sporting clubs established in the first half of the nineteenth century snowshoeing was an activity equally as significant for members of the M.S.S.C. as a social undertaking as it was an athletic endeavor. For example, the crowning feature of these early tramps, one that became a hallmark of all subsequent snowshoe outings was the “repair” to a famous cafe in St. James Street. Therein the snowshoers “stretched their pedal extremities under mine host Tetu’s mahogany” to consume food and drink. At the same time, the athletic nature of the activity was exemplified in the first year of formation of the M.S.S.C. when two white men agreed to race against some of the Indians from the Caughnawaga reserve near Montreal¹² in a four-mile contest over the St. Pierre horserace course in Montreal. Under icy conditions on the track, Nicholas Hughes, an original member of the M.S.S.C., placed second behind Deroche, a Nor’West voyageur who had driven nails through the wood of his snowshoes to increase traction. Five Indians followed Hughes including Jean Baptiste, the well known Indian lacrosse player and celebrated pilot of the Lachine Rapids.¹³ According to Becket:

Thus were the first races on shoes won in Canada under our auspices. We have no records of any other and may take the credit to ourselves of instituting the national sport of snowshoeing.¹⁴

The other event staged at these same races was a one mile steeplechase event over four feet hurdles.¹⁵ In all likelihood, these were equestrian hurdles stored at the St. Pierre horserace course. The height of the hurdles (suited to equestrian steeplechases) combined with the one mile distance and the double handicap of snowshoes under icy conditions must have made the event gruelling. Certainly

9. P. L. Lindsay, “The Impact of the Military Garrisons on the Development of Sport in British North America,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education* 1 (May, 1970): 33-44.

10. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 21st ed., s.v. “tramp.”

11. Metcalfe, “Organized Sport and Social Stratification in Montreal, 1840-1901,” p. 79.

12. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 4 and 10.

13. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 10-11, and *Montreal Daily Star*, February 6, 1884.

14. Becket *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 11. The author found no earlier record of snowshoe races in Montreal.

15. Ibid. The hurdle event was won by Edward Lamontagne of the M.S.S.C.

it would be unfamiliar to the Indians present. This hurdle race in 1843 antedates by seven years the date claimed by McIntosh and others to be the inauguration of the hurdle race.¹⁶

Snowshoe tramps took place in Quebec City as early as 1842 and races were staged by the Quebec Snow Shoe Club in 1847. Shoes at these early races weighed four pounds each and were made by the Caughnawaga Indians (Iroquois). In 1844, the racing shoe of one and a half pounds was introduced at the Montreal races although Becket reported that the Indians could not be persuaded to sell this model to whites until the following season. In 1845, the Montreal races at the St. Pierre course were opened to the public for the first time. Admission was free to ladies and five shillings for men. An event for boys under sixteen years of age was introduced. Yet tramping, not racing, was the prominent form of snowshoeing during the 1840s among the small fraternity of devotees. The first public race was an anomaly and not indicative of consistent or even alerted public awareness or interest.¹⁷

The M.S.S.C. was formally reorganized at "Dolly's chop house" in 1850 with the election of officers and a resolution to "muster" twice weekly at an appointed time and place.¹⁸ The rendezvous or meeting time and location for the tramps changed over the years, but became a standardized practice of every club. Since there were no clubhouses then and snowshoeing was an outdoor activity conducted in the frigid temperatures of mid winter, a precise rendezvous was a necessity. Similarly, at the rendezvous, the ranking officer customarily was appointed leader of the tramp and "follow the leader" was the rule. No one could pass the leader without his permission. This feature of the long distance walks was both a mark of respect and a safety precaution reinforced by the appointment of a "whipper-in." The latter was an experienced snowshoer appointed by the leader to bring up the rear of the file and to keep the group together.¹⁹ In the mid-1850s, the M.S.S.C. numbered fifty members. If fifteen to twenty members attended these early tramps, a figure supported by later records, group control exerted by a whipper-in was common sense.

16. P. C. McIntosh, *Sport in Society* (London: C. A. Watts, 1968), p. 67. McIntosh asserts that the undergraduates of Exeter College, Oxford, first adapted the equestrian steeplechase hurdle event to human runners in 1850 with a 140-yard foot race over 10 flights of three feet-six inches high hurdles. *The Oxford Companion to Sports and Games* also cites 1850 as the founding year of human hurdle racing and gives 1864 as the first instance of a 120 yards hurdle race (at Oxford University). See John Arlott, *The Oxford Companion to Sports and Games* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 509. The Montreal Snow Shoe Club hosted its first 120 yards hurdle event (over 3 feet high hurdles) during the 1858-1859 season. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 41.

17. *Montreal Gazette*, January 8, 1842, cited in Lindsay, "Sport in Canada, 1807-1867," p. 63; Becket; *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 13, and *Montreal Gazette*, February 11, 1845. Becket noted that there were "hundreds of visitors" at this first Public race meeting.

18. One of the meeting times was on Tuesday afternoons; only the elite would be able to meet then. Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons became the standardized rendezvous for the M.S.S.C. the following year and remained so for decades.

19. Terrain, breaking trail and honour may have all combined to dictate the single file nature of the tramps, but it is difficult to resist the association of in single file to Indian file, given the origins of snowshoeing. The use of the term "whipper-in" does not appear in primary documents until 1868 although the role is delineated as early as the 1850s. Minute Book of the M.S.S.C., December 2, 1868 Meeting, p. 108. The term is derived from hunting wherein the whipper-in was the huntsman's assistant. The term party whip in parliamentary procedure is a derivative of whipper-in. The only other Canadian sport, to the author's knowledge, where the term was common was in club outings of later 19th century bicycle clubs.



The Rendezvous at McGill College Gates. Source: *Dominion Illustrated Monthly*, 1889.

Race meetings in the 1850s reflected a trial and error quest for ideal racing distances. In 1856 efforts were made to bring the races within the city limits, but the format varied almost annually. For example, the 1850 race meeting included a three mile event (won in 22 minutes, 54 seconds) and a “novelty” race for Indian squaws. One year later, thirty dollars was offered as a first prize in a six-mile race in which eight competitors took part; the two white participants dropped out at the end of the first mile and six Indians finished the event with the winning time recorded at forty-seven minutes, twenty three seconds. Refined from the first hurdle-steeplechase event of 1843, the races eight years later featured a 200 yards contest over four hurdles set at three and a half feet. By 1856, the same event featured an eight dollar purse as first prize and the hurdles

were reduced to three feet in height.²⁰ The connection between financial prizes and non-amateurism had not been established. In Canada, the earliest issues of exclusion policies in sport were built on race prior to social or financial status.²¹

Tramping and racing were perceived as separate components of snowshoeing during the 1850s. The first known report merging these two elements into a cross country race was in 1852 when a small group tested themselves over a course from the rendezvous to St. Vincent de Paul, a small town about twelve miles outside of Montreal.²² Snowshoeing was a novelty in any of its forms, either by the M.S.S.C.'s choice to keep it that way, or, by public disinterest. The move to bring the races within city limits and to open races to public spectacle was significant as a hallmark of increasing competitive structure in the sport. Moreover, in 1858, the second club in the Montreal area, the Aurora Snow Shoe Club, was formed and held its first races at the Mile End course. The Aurora was a splinter group that broke from the M.S.S.C. over some difference of opinion among members.²³ This dispute may have stemmed from the formation of the Montreal Lacrosse Club (M.L.C.) in 1856 by several of the M.S.S.C. members in search of summer sport. The alliance between the M.S.S.C. and the M.L.C. was natural, given overlapping membership (and it was to become much stronger), but it may not have been palatable to some of the snowshoe purists. A third, Montreal-based club, the St. Georges Snow Shoe Club, was formed at the end of the 1858-1859 season.

By the late 1850s, a subtle vanity among the snowshoeing fraternity can be detected. Snowshoers were self congratulatory and proud of the stamina required for tramping (an aerobic endurance unusual for Canadian sport in this era) and the pluck or mettle necessary for racing (an anaerobic component in the sport) on the "encumbrance."²⁴ Snowshoeing, comparable to canoeing or rowing, was characteristic of the evolution of a method of transport to an implement of sport. Its adherents subscribed to a willing suspension to an unnecessary obstacle-wearing snowshoes in a sporting event was a handicap. Much faster times could be achieved in ice-skating, for example; certainly summer track race times on foot would never be lowered on snowshoes. The artificial nature of snowshoeing demanded devotion and, at the same time, was the central component in the special aura created by snowshoers around snowshoeing. Associated social behaviors such as drinking beer at the hotels or

20. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 16-40. The M.S.S.C. used either Priests' Farm on the outer limits of the city, or, the Mile End Course where a small grandstand was erected in 1859. The 6-mile performance time appears reasonable given later race records, yet timing accuracy is certainly questionable.

21. See D. Morrow, "A Case Study in Amateur Conflict: The Athletic War in Canada, 1906-08" *British Journal of Sports History* 3 (September, 1986): 174-175.

22. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 21. In the pre-race banter, competitors and well-wishers speculated on the outcome. One of the racers, George Colthurst, in an early exhibition of gamesmanship, took the pencil, "chalked number one on his shoe" and won the event.

23. *Montreal Daily Star*, February 6, 1884; Becket, *The Montreal Snow, Shoe Club*, pp. 37-38.

24. Becket used the term encumbrance in his book in proclaiming Indians to be "the originators of the encumbrance." Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 24. The feeling, in fact, that the novice snowshoer experiences now as one might have then, is akin to walking while wearing a diaper owing to the wide stance required in motion.

taverns frequented after a tramp was accepted behavior prior to the 1870s.²⁵ The juxtaposition of wine, women and manly snowshoers was literally enshrined in song by 1858:

Song of the Montreal Snow Shoe Club

By George Parys

Pass the bottle and fill your glasses,
Now that each has munched his "grub",
We'll drink success to the pretty lasses,
Whose lovers belong to the Snow Shoe Club.

Yes, to-night we'll all unite
To drink success to the Snow Shoe Club.

At racing, we challenge all creation,
Let them be prepared for a very hard rub,
If among the picked men of any nation,
Some think they can beat the Snow Shoe Club.

Then to-night, with all our might,
We'll drink success to the Snow Shoe Club.

All pretty girls take my advice,
On some vain fop don't waste your "lub",
But if you wish to hug something nice,
Why marry a boy of the Snow Shoe Club.

Then each night, with wild delight,
You'll sing success to the Snow Shoe Club.²⁶

The ascriptions of manliness to snowshoers in the foregoing song are blatant. Such special snowshoe-specific songs as well as more conventional songs like Rule Britannia, Partant pour la Syrie, La Marseillaise, Sur l'Océan and Rise, ye Sons of Canada were sung at the dinners and tavern-stops as early as 1856.²⁷

Public race meetings and media attention served to spotlight the sport and its idiosyncrasies to a wider audience. In the latter regard, a lengthy article in the *Montreal Transcript* in 1859 was ebullient in its vivid portrayal of the sport and reflected growing public attention to snowshoeing:

Half-past seven o'clock! and here we are at the rendezvous, in Sherbrooke Street, and here also are the members of the Snow-shoe Club, headed by their worthy President and Vice-President. "There were giants in those days," and these two gentlemen, from their height seem to be of the race of the Anakim. Your observation leads at once to the knowledge of the fact, that all the members are in appropriate costume, namely, a blanket coat, with capote attached, firmly bound round the waist with a sash or belt; blanket continuations, and mocassins of moose-skin; together with the indispensable snow-shoe. These, you will see, are made of hickory, bent so as to form an oval in front, and tapering gradually to the

25. By 1875, strict temperance while snowshoeing was a written regulation and part of an accepted code of conduct established by the clubs. Wine and spirits were not allowed for consumption. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

26. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 44-45.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

A Study of the Evolution of Sport in Nineteenth Century Montreal

rear, where they are tightly fastened together, and adorned, round the sides, with tufts of crimson wool. At an open space near the front, a thong of deerskin is fastened, forming an aperture for the reception of the great toe. The thong is then crossed over the top of the foot, passed round, and tied at the sides; thus leaving the heel at liberty to move up and down upon the shoe, and resting the weight of it upon the toes.²⁸

The blanket-coat uniform was standard snowshoeing garb and the abundant bill of fare at dinners was notorious. For example, after the race meeting on January 21, 1860, the snowshoers gathered at Moore's for dinner:

The necks of all the turkeys, geese and chickens in the village had been twisted for the occasion and a sirloin of beef weighing 100 pounds lay smoking on the table to which the hungry snowshoers did ample justice.²⁹

Prizes given to snowshoe racers tended to be monetary in the early years of the development of the sport. By 1859/1860, prizes for white competitors were in the form of silk sashes, belts, medals and small cups.³⁰ The first prestigious trophy donated for racing honors was the Williams Cup awarded initially to W. S. Macdougall of the M.S.S.C. in 1861.³¹

The racing venue for the three Montreal clubs was shifted to the grounds of the Montreal Cricket Club in the same year. Large advertisements for race meets, complete with hand-drawn sketches of the events, began to appear in the popular press during the early 1860s. Such media attention to snowshoeing must be interpreted as part of an increase in sports reporting in general in major Canadian cities, not as a unique feature of snowshoeing.³² Still, snowshoe event reports were significant in the development and dispersion of snowshoeing to the public and the advertisements provide considerable insight into the sport. The fixtures for the 1862 M.S.S.C. annual races appeared in the *Montreal Herald* as follows:

Montreal Snow-Shoe Club
ANNUAL RACES
To COME OFF on the GROUNDS of the
MONTREAL CRICKET CLUB, St. Catherine
Street on,
Saturday Afternoon next, 8th inst.,
at TWO o'clock punctually,
(Weather permitting)

INDIAN RACE OF FOUR MILES-Open to all, for a Purse of \$20.
HURDLE RACE-Over Four Hurdles, 3 feet 4 inches high, open to all, for a
Prize Belt.

28. Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 51-52. The article is written as an eyewitness account of an M.S.S.C. tramp.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

30. Montreal Snow Shoe Club Minute Books, 1861 to 1870, and Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*. p. 57.

31. The cup was open to "all-comers" regardless of club affiliation and was donated by General Sir Fenwick Williams. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, December 6, 1861, p. 1.

32. Lindsay, "The Impact of the Military Garrisons," 41. Lindsay pointed out that an increased population had more time, more opportunities and more interest in pursuing, actively and passively, recreational and sporting activities in general.

ONE MILE RACE-Open to all. Prize a Silver Medal.

RACE of 150 YARDS, in Heat-Open to all. Prize a Silver Medal.

GARRISON RACE of Half-a-Mile-Open to non-commissioned officers and privates-Regulation Snow-shoes-Prizes, 1st \$5, 2nd \$4, 3rd \$2

CLUB RACE OF TWO MILES-Open to Mem-[sic] only. Prize a Silver Cup.

HALF-MILE DASH-Open to all. Prize a Silver Medal.

No racing allowed with Snow-shoes under 10 inches width.

A list will be found at "Dolly's," where Entries can be made until 12 o'clock, noon, on Saturday. Badges maybe obtained at Pickup's and at Dolly's,

PRICE OF ADMISSION-Ladies, free; Gentlemen, 25 cents; Sleighs, 50 cents

Honorary Steward;

Lieut-Gen. Sir W. F. Williams, K.C.B.

Stewards:

Col. MacKenzie, C. B.,

Edwd. M. Hopkins, Esq.,

Col. Kelly, C.B.,

Augustus Heward, Esq.,

Col. Connolly, D.A.G.,

C. J. Coursol, Esq.33

With respect to the actual development of snowshoe racing, the ad implies that a reactionary rule was made to customize the expanse of stringing in the racing shoe. Furthermore, the advertisement is indicative of the business acumen of the members of the M.S.S.C. Organization, mandatory pre-race registration and punctuality are strongly evident. Non-members, Indians and garrison personnel were allowed although the prestige event, the Club Race of Two Miles, was closed to all except M.S.S.C. members. Moreover, the dignity and official position of the stewards was highlighted to add distinction to the event. The prevailing feature of the ad is its military overtones. Unlike race cards prior to 1861, half of the stewards were officers and there was a designated military race. Clearly, these were indicators of a degree of organizational sophistication and a pronounced injection of militarism.

The reason for the military attachment to the sport of snowshoeing, of course, was the perceived threats of annexation and resultant military preparedness engendered by the American Civil War. The initial impact on snowshoeing was a decline in participation. Snowshoers rallied to support preparedness when the members of the Montreal and Aurora snowshoe clubs and the members of the Beaver Lacrosse Club amalgamated their resources to form a rifle regiment called the Victoria Rifles, 3rd Battalion. The inclusion of military officers as patrons or stewards of racing events seemed axiomatic but the actual sport participation by garrison soldiers was not characteristic of the normal pattern of garrison officer influence on Canadian sport.³⁴ Instead of providing leadership and promoting the sport through patronage combined with participative excellence, British officers were inexperienced as snowshoers. Non-commissioned

33. Cited in M.S.S.C. Minute Book, February 27, 1862, p. 13. A three-inch sketch preceded the printed advertisement clipped from the *Herald*. At the races themselves, a bell was rung ten minutes prior to each event to signal competitors to the starting area.

34. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 80, 87. On the military aspects of sport, see Lindsay, "The Impact of the Military Garrisons," 33-44. Lindsay demonstrated that it was the British garrison officers who provided the paramount influence on Canadian sport prior to 1867.

officers and privates, normally excluded or absent from sport, provided comic relief in the garrison half mile races:

Those of our readers who have seen the gallant defenders of our country, floundering and rolling about, encumbered by those rascally frames of gut and hardwood, christened 'snow shoes' and supplied by Government to their unsophisticated wearers will hear me out when I say that one of the best recipes for the 'blues' is to be present at a half mile race on snow shoes open only to the Garrison.³⁵

The impact of threatened conflict was responsible only in part for decreased attendance at snowshoe races and club tramps between 1860 and 1865. Clubs seemed to absorb the changes brought about through proximity to the American war. Indeed, new snowshoe songs such as "The Raging War Fever"³⁶ lavished praise on the recruitment potential of the sport's athletes. A greater impediment to the stability or growth of the sport of snowshoeing was the skating mania that enveloped Montreal and other cities during the 1860s.³⁷ Membership in the M.S.S.C. declined from ninety-one in 1861³⁸ to thirty-eight³⁹ during the 1865-1866 season "with Volunteering and the Skating Rink proving powerful rivals."⁴⁰ Club "musters" or gatherings for the tramps were often cancelled to allow members to attend drill sessions⁴¹ and in 1865, the M.S.S.C. annual public races were cancelled because the club felt its members had not trained as well as snowshoers from other clubs. M.S.S.C. members' vanity and competitiveness were evident and were challenged vehemently by other clubs' members who felt the M.S.S.C. was "elevating the white feather." The M.S.S.C. held private races that year exclusively for club members in the Victoria Gardens to protect its "enviable reputation."⁴² Both sides of the dispute carried weight; all public races in the past had been open, yet the M.S.S.C. made its decision to forego its annual public races prior to the snowshoe season, not at the last minute. The significant point is that the competitive spirit in snowshoeing was intensifying despite the war and the siphoning of snowshoers to the skating rinks. The concept of military training may have fostered the concept of sport-specific training for snowshoeing. Indirectly, then, military preparedness might have crystallized concepts of intensified training for competitive snowshoeing racing.

By the end of the 1850s snowshoeing was extracted from its aboriginal origins and developed within Montreal into distinct tramping (recreational),

35. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 75-76. In true sporting spirit, some officers of the 47th Regiment did challenge some of the M.S.S.C. members to a cross country race to Lachine but the officers were beaten easily. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-91 wherein the event was immortalized in verse in honour of the "scarlet coated gentlemen."

36. *Ibid.*, p. 87. Another "Travel Fast," was sung to the tune of Camp Town Races, reflective of American influence at the time.

37. See Lindsay, "A History of Sport in Canada, 1807 to 1867," pp. 50-57. The mania was claimed to extend from "Gaspé to Sarnia." By 1863, Montreal had constructed two indoor skating rinks, the Victoria Rink and Guilbault's Rink and there were numerous outdoor facilities in the city.

38. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, December 6, 1861, pp. 2-3.

39. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 123.

40. *Ibid.*

41. The military term "muster" crept into snowshoeing jargon during the early 1860s and stayed with the sport.

42. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, December 10 and 19, 1865 and January 27, 1866, pp. 41, 43, 50-55.

racing (competitive) and the hybrid cross country racing (competitive) forms of sporting activities. Races conducted prior to the early 1860s lacked organization and standardization, yet there were distinct indices of public acquaintance with snowshoeing and standard features in the activity such as clubbing, uniforms, a rendezvous site, a reliance on cafes and hotels as meeting places and venues for post-tramping activities and sumptuous meals as well as a distinct, detectable self esteem among the snowshoers themselves. The qualities associated with being a snowshoer by 1860 included manliness, skill, vigor and a pronounced devotion to the activity. The steadfast resolution of snowshoers was demonstrated often under adverse conditions. If no snow had fallen by the date of the first scheduled tramp, members strapped their snowshoes to their backs and walked over the planned route; if racing conditions were prohibitive, a walk-race was substituted. On cross country tramps over hilly terrain under crisp, slippery snow conditions, snowshoes were broken, ankles were fractured, frostbite and blisters were common and yet all mishaps were accepted as part of the hibernal manliness. "Speed and bottom" were snowshoe racers self-heralded qualities and trampers boasted their abilities to outstrip trains point to point. Still the sport was in its infancy and was pre-industrial in its form prior to 1860.

Snowshoeing experienced considerable setbacks in terms of growth and dispersion during the first half of the decade of the 1860s. At the same time, the sport adapted to and was shaped by the war years as snowshoeing underwent significant modifications that became regular features of snowshoeing. Some steps were taken during the Civil War years to attract interest in the sport. A spectators' grandstand was erected by the M.S.S.C. in 1864 complete with a dressing room for competitors underneath and a refreshment booth operated by a well known caterer.⁴³ A judges platform was built across the track from the grandstand and a separate area was designated for the viewing pleasure of those who attended in their "private equipages" (sleighs). Boys' races (under 14 years of age) were reinstituted in an obvious effort to recruit new adherents. At the annual dinners in the 1860s, members rallied fiercely to the strains of "God Save the Queen" and Her Royal Highness was toasted repeatedly amidst "rauccous cheers."⁴⁴ Speeches, toasts, singing and dancing among members were commonplace at the social gatherings of the snowshoe clubs. At the M.S.S.C. annual dinner in March, 1867, just prior to Confederation, Nicholas "Evergreen" Hughes, a twenty-seven-year member of the club made an impassioned speech proclaiming the fine qualities of perseverance and self-denial of snowshoers in "cultivating bodily superiority" that was so important for the "future Kingdom of Canada."⁴⁵ There were infusions of imperialism and nationalism into snowshoeing as well as an intensification of training, all of

43. Ibid., p. 38. The grandstand was probably a portable structure since, in 1868, the M.S.S.C. rented a grandstand for \$14 from the Ladies Benevolent Society, M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 91.

44. *Montreal Transcript*, March 5, 1863. Part of the chorus of God Save the Queen at this time included the line "Confound her enemies," the singing of which was said to have "made the welkin ring," Ibid.

45. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 70.

which were derived from the war. By-products of the militaristic impact on snowshoeing included musters, medals for prizes, official race patronage, and increased organizational structure. Yet the Civil War's influence was really just to restrain the establishment of snowshoeing in Montreal. Important changes were wrought during the war years and these changes proved to be significant in shaping the recreational and competitive elements of snowshoeing during the decade following the war.

II

In the season following Confederation (1867), snowshoeing was not only re-energized but experienced phenomenal growth in the numbers of participants and the formation of new clubs. Lindsay claimed this was directly attributable to lacrosse. He reasoned that because George Beers, the father of modern lacrosse, had so successfully promoted the summer sport-the number of the lacrosse clubs in Canada mushroomed in 1867 from nine in July to eighty in November-that lacrosse clubs almost naturally formed snowshoe clubs that winter in order to provide opportunities for an off-season counterpart.⁴⁶ Snowshoeing would not seem to be the natural winter sport selection; ice-skating would have been the more likely candidate in view of the prevailing skating "mania."⁴⁷ Snowshoeing was selected by lacrosse enthusiasts because of the example set by the prestigious M.S.S.C. Beers was a club member who always extolled the virtues of snowshoeing while Nicholas Hughes was president of the Montreal Lacrosse Club in 1867. Cross membership between the M.S.S.C. and the Montreal Lacrosse Club was considerable and since Montreal retained its prominence as the centre of snowshoeing all evidence points to the M.S.S.C. as the significant bonding agent in the marriage of snowshoeing and lacrosse. Whatever the reasons for the relationship between lacrosse and snowshoeing, the impact was pronounced and reflected in the Montreal press.

Snowshoeing experienced an explosion of interest and growth after 1867. In 1868 seventy-seven new members were proposed for membership in the M.S.S.C. and it repealed its own by-law of maximum membership of 150 to accommodate the new members. Furthermore, spectator interest mushroomed. The *Montreal Gazette* reported that there were 800 spectators at the 1868 annual races of the Alexander Snow Shoe Club⁴⁸ and in the following year, 5,000 spectators supposedly witnessed the races of the Ottawa Snow Shoe Club. From 1868 to 1875, the annual budget statements of the M.S.S.C. carried an expense

46. Lindsay, "Sport in Canada, 1807-1867," p. 70. Beers was a "flaming lacrosse evangelist," renowned as such in his own time. Ibid., p. 129, and P. S. Lindsay, "George Beers and the National Game Concept: A Behavioral Approach," *Proceedings of the Second Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (1972): 27-44.

47. Even more logical or natural as a winter counterpart to lacrosse would have been ice hockey; however, hockey was in its infancy and without even rudimentary rules until 1875. These rules and those that followed demonstrate that ice hockey was, in fact, a winter compromise of lacrosse and rugby football. By the 1890s, the compromise had consumed snowshoeing.

48. *Montreal Gazette*, February 10, 1868.

entry for about twenty dollars to hire police to keep the track free of intruders.⁴⁹ For similar reasons, the "home stretch" of the 100 yards in front of the grandstands was guarded by a protective railing after 1868. The major reason for the sudden spectorial enthusiasm for the sport was because of gambling inclinations and opportunities. While tramping retained the original snowshoeing elements of adventure and "tip-top jollifications,"⁵⁰ racing was the focus of the public eye and competition increased in reaction to the new enthusiasm. If gambling was a feature of races prior to 1868, it was likely confined to the members themselves in the form of "gentlemen's wagers." After 1868, commercial, spectorial interests intensified competition.

An event in 1868 reflected the new betting interest. W. L. Maltby, the premier white snowshoe racer at the time, raced alone a half mile down Sherbrooke Street from Mountain Street to Union Avenue against the clock. Nominal wagers were offered and taken for and against Maltby completing the distance under 2 minutes and fifty seconds. When he succeeded, odds were immediately set for another race to be completed in reduced time.⁵¹ Press reports began to underline specific factors that affected performance in order to provide pre-race betting information. For example, Maltby was reported to be "high in flesh" at the 1869 annual races of the Dominion Snow Shoe Club and odds were set at two to one against him winning the mile.⁵²

Gambling considerations impinged directly on race formalization. Clubs in 1870 instituted an entrance fee for competitors at the various races; the fee was returned if the competitor showed up on race day. Apparently, snowshoers signed up for races in advance and did not appear for all events thereby spoiling betting calculations much to the chagrin of the public press.⁵³ Within three seasons, betting became normative behavior at snowshoe races to such an extent that the *Montreal Gazette* perceived it only fitting to print race cards to cater to public zeal for the sport and the associated wagering.

It would seem, then, that the competitive treadmill in Montreal snowshoe racing was set in motion by a rapid expansion of public interest in the sport which in turn, was propelled by the zeal for gambling. Until the mid-1860s, the sport was relatively restricted to participants. Considering the decline in the sport because of the impact of the Civil War and the skating mania, the unbridled public enthusiasm for the sport in the late-1860s might have overwhelmed the inveterate snowshoers.

The order of events of a race meeting became nearly standardized during the late 1860s and 1870s to a card of eight events in conformance with the pattern established by the M.S.S.C. In specific order, the card included a two mile

49. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, pp. 93-174. The sire of the crowd is suspect; half that number is plausible given later attendance records.

50. *Montreal Daily News*, February 16, 1868, used the term "jollification." "The word is a noun used to mean, merry making. It would seem to be the only single word in the English language that compresses the elemental feeling of being at play or in the play-spirit, although it is not a common term in modern usage.

51. 1868 press clippings cited in M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 85.

52. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 134. Presumably, this meant he was overweight and not fit since the same article described him as "being yet too stout."

53. *Montreal Gazette*, January 22, 1870.

Indian race, an open one mile, a hurdle race, a half-mile boy's race, a 100 yards dash event, a garrison or open half mile race, the premier two mile club race and a final half-mile dash. This formalization of the proper race-form accounts further for the popularity of competitive snowshoeing during this period. The prestige event at all races was the two-mile club race. It was perceived as the "experimentum crucis"⁵⁴ of the stamina and training of the host club's members. Shorter distances, the hurdle event and 100 yard dash, were run in heats that demanded repeated demonstrations of anaerobic endurance. Unlike modern track events wherein sprints are conducted in heats to narrow the field and comparable to some horseracing events of the day, competitors in snowshoeing participated in three or four heats, often with less than five minutes separating each heat. To win, the racer had to be the victor in two heats. Heats created a dramatic gambling situation. Furthermore, this system required a new discipline and commitment to racing that was abhorred by some of the "old guard" snowshoers. As Becket proclaimed in 1881:

One straight heat seemed to be the favorite way of testing the merits of competitors in the 'old times' races, and the hope still lingers fondly with some of us, that those days may return when we can leave our office stools to compete, with some chance of success, instead of resorting to the laborious system of training which now threatens to bring our gentlemanly sports to the level of professionalism.⁵⁵

The sport was definitely outstripping "old times" because of the thrust toward more organized and standardized races, faster performance and betting.

In addition to the increased emphasis on training, other signs of intensified competitiveness became evident during the 1870s. For example, when the Grand Trunk Snow Shoe Club held its races in 1870 at Point St. Charles, the track was cleared by snow-plow and packed so that racers could run three abreast.⁵⁶ Thus, care was taken to both standardize and equalize racing venues. Passing on circular or oval tracks with only a single, packed racing lane was difficult; the technique for passing under one-lane conditions was known as "the brush."⁵⁷ Drafting the lead racer was in evidence during this period, a further indication of the "science" or strategy brought to the sport when success was underlined. Furthermore, increased attention was devoted to the precise determination of race and track distances. Clubs engaged professional surveyors to set accurate distances.⁵⁸ The starting signal for races was given by various means, such as the drop of a cap, the tap of a drum, or a verbal signal, until

54. Montreal Daily News, March 4, 1867. and M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 70.

55. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 43.

56. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 126. A good racing track was one that was wide, level and hard-packed with snow. This club was an employee club of the Grand Trunk Railway. The course was marked out "on the field to the south of the workshops" thereby indicative of company cooperation and the filtering of snowshoe racing to another segment of society. At the races, the Grand Trunk Brigade band played brass instruments in subfreezing weather and all. Bands were common at ice skating events at the time, but this is the first report found of a band in attendance at a snowshoeing meeting.

57. "The Laws of Snowshoe Racing," revised and amended by the M.S.S.C., 1878, in M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1878, n.p. A competitor had to be six feet in advance of another competitor before crossing his track and he had to brush or pass on the outside.

58. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 139. There is evidence of surveyors setting and marking snowshoe race courses as early as 1869.

March 14, 1868, when the start by pistol was first used.⁵⁹ Within two years, the pistol start became the standard starting method for all snowshoe race meetings. In an effort to ensure the best possible winter conditions for racing, the annual races for each club were moved from mid or late March back to mid February in the early 1870s. Therefore, instead of the annual races marking the closing to a snowshoe season and being run under any weather conditions (even the snowshoers' worst enemy, rain), the move to February was clearly an effort to improve the quality and performance of races. Increased club revenues from gate receipts combined with sponsorships by hotel proprietors in the form of material racing awards to make prizes for race victors became more practical and more valuable than the standard cups and trophies or the medals popularized by the militarism of the 1860s. "Splendidly carved" meerschaum pipes became the coveted award for racers because they could be openly displayed and used practically at social gatherings.⁶⁰ Equally common prizes during the 1870s and into the 1880s included silver tankards, crystal service sets, claret jugs, dressing cases, sets of razors and writing cabinets. The donation of prizes from hotel proprietors reflected the business acumen of hotel-keepers seeking dinner patrons. Such entrepreneurial support indicates the popularity of the sport and its widening impact on the city of Montreal.⁶¹

Absolute comparisons of racing times for various events over the entire period of study are impossible to make. Track conditions varied with the weather, the season, the nature of the snow, the nature of the track (straight or oval/circular), the number of laps (half mile, quarter mile and three and a half laps to the mile tracks were common) and the width of the track. Race times were perceived as less significant prior to the late 1860s than race results and were either not recorded or not even taken.⁶² Starting methods and hurdle heights varied and the number of hurdles in a 120 yard event changed from as many as eight to as few as four. Notwithstanding these limitations, the rate of performance in snowshoe racing was remarkable. Five minute, fifty second miles were common after 1869. Rates in longer events varied between six and seven minute miles. In the sprint events, the standing start and early acceleration strides towards maximum speed must have been very difficult with the added physical impediment of snowshoes; nevertheless, a 13.5 seconds hun-

59. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 148, and M.S.S.C. Minute Book, pp. 102-103. False starters were penalized by being put back one yard for each false start.

60. The first one awarded was to John F. Scholes, a "professional" racer from Toronto, in 1871. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 198. There were no clear amateur/professional distinctions then. In all likelihood, Scholes declared his intent to win at a profit by snowshoe racing. John F. Scholes' son, Lou won the English Henley diamond (single) sculls in 1904.

61. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 189-491; M.S.S.C. Minute Books, 1873 to 1884; and newspaper sources. Particularly popular to snowshoe trampers were the hotels located at Côte des Neiges on Mount Royal. These hotels were in constant competition for snowshoers' business with downtown hotels. Roy's, the Côte des Neiges, Bellevue and Prendergast's were the hotels frequented on the mountain during the 1870s and early 1880s.

62. Even when times were taken in a competitive event, the reliability was questionable. For example, in a two mile race in 1871, timed with stop-watches, seven different times varying from 14:09 to 14:42 were given for the winner. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 133.

dred yards event was only 3.5 seconds slower than a competitive footrace in the same period.

Indian performance times were superior to “white” records. Never assimilated into competitive snowshoeing, Indians were victims of social and racial discrimination by white snowshoers. Clearly the sport was indebted to its native origins; however, no Indian ever was allowed or even considered for membership in any snowshoe club during the period under examination. Because of their perceived innate skill in snowshoeing and because they were a crowd-drawing feature, the “Indian Race” varying in distance from two to four miles, was the first event on almost every race card of every club from the inception of white racing. All of the other races were understood to be closed to Indians, although there were exceptions. Gifted racers in the white man’s eyes, the Indians were regarded as socially inferior to the white upper and middle classes. Blatant discrimination was rampant.

Although Indian excellence in the sport was unquestioned and admired, stereotyping, derision and ridicule were common. If an Indian did beat a white



The Athletic Club House at Côte des Neiges on Mount Royal. This club house served as snowshoers’ social centre during the 1870s and 1880s. Source: M.A.A.A. Scrapbook, Vol. 17.

man, the excuse was obvious-after all, it was a native activity. Indians' prizes were always monetary since it was felt that money created a stronger, competitive environment for them. The money was often given in small silk purses and usually distributed right after the race meeting whereas prizes for whites were frequently awarded at a social gathering later on. When all prizes were given at the race site, the awards for Indians were made in a separate area. Newspaper reports reinforced and probably helped to shape racist attitudes towards Indians. After Thomas, the renowned Indian snowshoe racer, won a two mile event in 1866, the *Montreal Transcript's* racial bias came through in its report of the awards ceremony in which Colonel Lyons presented a cash prize to Thomas:

I am happy to present you with this purse, with the contents of which, I dare say, you will soon make yourself acquainted (Cheers and roars of laughter). The Indian, who, during the delivery of the above remarks, wore a look of imperturbable gravity, as soon as he received the purse, allowed his features to broaden into a smile, and was received with many guttural congratulations by his swarthy brethren, who escorted him in triumph from the grounds.⁶³

The popular press mirrored the snowshoers' regard for Indians. Not surprisingly, Becket's history of the M.S.S.C. contains many examples of racial bias.⁶⁴

Occasionally, an outstanding white snowshoe racer entered the Indian racing event as a white hope to secure snowshoeing supremacy. So it was 1868 when



Artist's sketch of a snowshoe race in progress circa 1875. Source: M.S.S.C. Scrapbook, 1873-1878.

63. *Montreal Transcript*, March 5, 1866.

64. See, for example, Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 187.

Maltby entered the Indian race. The result, Maltby's defeat, was characteristically dismissed:

The sachems seem to have an hereditary power of running that even their natural laziness and love of fire water cannot destroy.⁶⁵

Furthermore, Indians were used and ridiculed in "novelty" races. In 1868 the Dominion Club held a half mile novelty event in which competitors dragged a toboggan in each of which a "young savage" was strapped. At a winter sports day in 1875 hosted by the Volunteers at Decker Park, Montreal, four Indians were entered in a 100 yard snowshoe-potato race in which each competitor had to pick up the potatoes placed every yard along the stretch and return them, one at a time, to a basket at the starting line.⁶⁶ Such degrading practices against Indians reflected a social class ostracism in competitive sport that was as prevalent in track and field and lacrosse. Indians were perceived as lower class athletes by the middle class organizers of sport and as possessed of some natural advantage in sport. Therefore, Indians were excluded from white competitions, held up to ridicule, or persuaded to perform to exhaustion.

When snowshoe race competitions intensified in the late 1860s, efforts were made to push Indians to the limits of their endurance for reasons of pure spectacle and wagering. Five extra dollars was offered for the two mile Indian race of the Alexandra Club in 1869, if the first mile was done under 5 minutes, 50 seconds, and ten dollars extra if the winning time was under 12 minutes, 30 seconds.⁶⁷ By the same year, the once dominant M.S.S.C. was being defeated soundly by the members of other clubs at race meetings. When the M.S.S.C. hosted its race meeting in 1869, it allowed Indians to enter all events, an unprecedented conciliation. The M.S.S.C encouraged Indians to enter for the sole purpose of protecting its racing reputation. Other clubs were incensed even though nothing had been written disallowing Indian competitors.⁶⁸

The Indian, Keraronwe (or, Keraroniare) was without peer in snowshoe racing and was universally admired during the nineteenth century. Keraronwe was capable of racing speeds well under six minute miles for the two-mile event

65. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 93. Even the snowshoe songs showed discriminatory attitudes. In one song, "Travel Fast," composed in 1863 and sung to the tune of Camptown Races, the first verse began:

For the four mile, Indians clear the track,

Off they rush in a very large pack,

There led by the son of an ugly squaw. . .

The song is printed in full in Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 102-104.

66. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 151. 307.

67. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 131, and Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 167.

68. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, press clippings, and *Montreal Gazette*, February 27, 1869. The only written rule to exclude Indians from athletic events found by the writer was a very early (for Canadian sport) definition of an amateur:

One who has never competed in any open competition for public money, or for admission money, nor has ever taught, or assisted in the pursuit of Athletic exercise as a means of livelihood *or is a labourer or an Indian*. Constitution and By-Laws of the Montreal Pedestrian Club (Montreal: J. C. Becket Printers, 1873). article XII, p. 8, emphasis mine. In the early 1870s, a few "pedestrian" clubs, such as the Montreal and the Tecumseh, were organized as summer equivalents to snowshoe clubs and were prompted by the prevailing popularity of snowshoeing. They were weak efforts to bring organization to track and field and passed out of existence within a few years.

and even six minute miles in four-mile races and totally dominated the races he entered for over a decade beginning in 1868. Even Becket was unrestrained in his estimation of the athlete.⁶⁹ Keraronwe continued to finish respectably in races until the early 1880s and received only one mild, derogatory racial comment in the press.⁷⁰ He was very much the exception to general racial slander in the sport of snowshoeing and the respect he acquired represented equivocal appreciation of his racing excellence.

One of the distinctive and detracting features in the development of snowshoeing was the failure to form an umbrella agency to govern the sport. Snowshoeing was localized in large urban centers such as Ottawa, Toronto, Quebec City and Montreal. The latter was recognized as the center of the sport under the leadership of the M.S.S.C. No national sport governing body for snowshoeing was formed in the nineteenth century. When the Amateur Athletic Association of Canada was formed in 1884, snowshoeing adhered to its rules with respect to championships, amateurism and reinstatement of athletes. However, the A. A. A. of Canada did nothing to develop or promote snowshoeing; the Association merely regulated the sport according to prevailing amateur standards. Given the organizational leadership of the M.S.S.C., the oldest founding club of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association and the fact that the M.A.A.A. was the major impetus behind the formation of the C.A.A.A. in 1883-1884, this failure to create an umbrella governing body seems unusual. The prevailing perception was that snowshoeing was comparable to track and field (also without an umbrella governing body). The competitive format in both was determined, only regulation was needed. Unlike team sports, snowshoeing did not need leagues, regional divisions and playoff formats.

Most clubs governed their own race meetings and, therefore, controlled their own competitive environment. When the M.S.S.C. was perceived to be flexing its muscle, or exerting unfair control, other clubs protested in the press, as they did when the Montreal S.S.C. was made the overseer of the Tecumseh Cup, an elaborate trophy donated for special races in 1868 and when the allowance of Indians into all M.S.S.C. races was made in 1869.⁷¹ Following the Tecumseh Cup disputes, two of the M.S.S.C.'s best racers, W.L. Maltby and James Henderson, resigned from the club and joined the Alexander Club in order to compete for the Cup. When Maltby lined up for the race, fellow competitors

69. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 133. Becket, it seems, just could not bring himself to hail Keraronwe as the best *snowshoer*, rather he described Keraronwe as the "best *Indian* we ever saw upon the track." There is absolutely no doubt about the white supremacist attitude toward Indians in Montreal as reflected in the sport of snowshoeing.

70. When Keraronwe won the Indian race of the Grand Trunk club in 1869, the press comment was that he "no doubt went home convinced that the 20 dollars stowed away in his pocket made him a millionaire." M.S.S.C. Minute Book, press clipping, 1869, p. 126.

71. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 144-148. It was provided by an anonymous donor and because of the controversy surrounding the M.S.S.C. and that club's alleged refusal to be the patrons of the Tecumseh Cup, it became a prominent and cherished trophy among the Montreal clubs during the 1870s. The cup was described as vase-like, made of sterling silver with the cup supported by four snowshoe figures and the trunk of a maple tree with silver leaves descending from the tree branches. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 103. The Tecumseh Cup currently is the property of the M.A.A.A.

protested his entry and the judges disqualified him.⁷² The decision to reject Maltby was tantamount to a late transfer ineligibility regulation in team sports.⁷³ Ad hoc ways and means existed to protect the interests of all competitors.

As chaotic as disputes might have been, their appearance in the late 1860s and early 1870s highlighted the competitive intensity of snowshoeing. Resolution of these differences reflected modern industrial organization and often brought standardization to the sport. For example, in 1870, one competitor defied the accepted method of clearing the barriers in hurdle races. Competitors were expected to clear the hurdles by jumping them completely, or, gently touch the tail of the snowshoe on the front edge of the hurdle. A new technique was employed at the 1870 M.S.S.C. races and was quickly criticized:

This was no hurdle race—Armstrong who is a very fast and strong runner, jumping deliberately on every hurdle, and off again, country milk-maid style. This humbug should be stopped. If hurdles are to be climbed over let the gentlemen have a flight of steps and a spring board. Oh for the days of the Murrays before the bastard racing came into vogue.⁷⁴

The hurdles must have been the sturdy equestrian variety to support the snowshoers' weight; miscalculation in attempting to clear the hurdles was common and resulted in broken snowshoes and frequent injuries. Hurdle heights were eventually standardized at three feet and a formal rule was adopted in the 1878 Laws of Snow Shoe Racing that required full clearance of each hurdle. These Laws⁷⁵ were the first written rules in the sport, the only previous codifications in the sport being organizational details published at the bottom of all race advertisements. The standardization of the racing shoe to one and a half pounds with no less than ten inches of gut at the widest part was produced by a "convention" of snowshoers from various Montreal clubs held at the Globe Chop House on December 30, 1871.⁷⁶ Until the laws of racing were published

72. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, pp. 102-103. Maltby quickly re-applied to the M.S.S.C. asking to "let by gones be bygoness" regarding the Tecumseh Cup issue and was re-accepted by the M.S.S.C. Ibid., p. 112.

73. In this Tecumseh Cup dispute as well as the 1869 M.S.S.C. allowance to Indians in all of its races, the Montreal press always took a side and supported the M.S.S.C. The Club, on the other hand, chose to stay out of the controversies lest it "belittle" its reputation through petty squabbles. The prestige attached to the M.S.S.C. was reinforced by its racing advertisements which were often entitled in the 1870s as the "Grand Races" of the M.S.S.C. instead of the customary "Annual Races" of any other snowshoe club.

74. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, press clipping, p. 129. The use of the term "country milk-maid style" is interesting; the implication, of course, was that the manliness of the sport was destroyed by this female-typified technique.

75. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1878-1885, pp. 13-15. "The Laws of Snow Shoe Racing." 1878. The laws of 1878 were divided into nineteen categories and covered shoe specifications, starting methods and positions, heats, brushing, fouling, accidents, losing a shoe, running "fraudulently" (a racer judged to be holding back or not trying to win was disqualified for 12 months), hurdling, the betting of judges (race judges were not allowed to bet), decisions and appeals, and distancing. In races run in heats for events 440 yards in length, a distance post was placed at various points prior to the finish; e.g. for the 440 yards, the distance post was 50 yards before the finish, for the 880 yards, it was 80 yards before the finish. Race competitors had to reach the distance post by the time the winner reached the finish; failing to reach the post meant the competitor was "distanced" and could not start in any other heats of that race. The modern expression of outdistancing an opponent in a foot race is derived from the distance post regulation. A snowshoer who completed a race at a reduced pace after all the others had either finished or dropped out was said to have "jogged" the remainder of the race.

76. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 222. No length was specified; the expanse of gut or stringing must have dictated the length of the shoe overall.

seven years later, all other matters concerning the sport were ruled upon at the various race meetings.

There were other features of the normalization process that were incorporated to sustain competition. Races for inept garrison personal remained a standard feature until the mid 1870s. Then in 1876, the M.S.S.C. changed the race to one for Montreal policemen while retaining the monetary prizes. Thereafter, most clubs held the same race with either policemen or firemen as the competitors; it was pure entertainment bordering on the ridiculous since the races for the service personnel were never taken seriously. In all other races, except the Indian races, every effort was made to ensure equality in competition. As the number of outstanding racers increased, clubs moved to handicap events in an attempt to provide uncertainty of outcome or to place competitors "as nearly as possible on an equal footing."⁷⁷ Based upon established reputations and the length of the event, competitors were placed from "scratch" (the starting line), through to fifty or a hundred yards from scratch. By the late 1870s, most clubs had a handicapping committee at the races, the sole task of which was to establish the handicap distances.⁷⁸ The organizational logistics of staging races demanded uniformity. These races brought a new dimension to wagering and thereby increased the excitement for spectators. The system also provided a built-in incentive for the best racers to perform to their potential and it created greater commercial appeal.

The revealing indicator of the premier position of snowshoeing as *the* winter sport of the 1870s was the inclusion of a snowshoe contest on ice at the Montreal skating races. On February 1, 1873, the Victoria Rink held the first such snowshoe race on ice with a best of three heats event covering five laps of the rink. The initial intent may have been either an effort to capitalize on the popularity of snowshoe racing or to belittle the athletes with the equilibrium problems. Whatever the motivation, the snowshoe races on ice captured public enthusiasm and the races became regular features on the race cards of ice-skating rinks.⁷⁹ In complete reversal of a decade earlier, snowshoeing rode the crest of public popularity in the 1870s. This change was due to its commercial appeal and attendant organizational improvements. Adherents of the sport continued to donate prizes, including special trophies such as the Tecumseh Cup, or the Worthington Cup, donated by James Worthington in 1879 for a one mile "championship of Canada" race open to any snowshoe club member.⁸⁰

Because tramping, the original, recreational form of snowshoeing could not be commercially developed, it did not enjoy the same kind of spectatorial growth and admiration as did racing in the late 1860s and 1870s. Nevertheless,

77. *Montreal Daily News*, March, 1868, cited in M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 102.

78. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 337. In summer track races of the period, handicap events were so popular in Montreal that at least one major meet during the season was devoted to handicap races.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 299, 304, 421, and, press clippings in M.S.S.C. Minute Books.

80. Annual Report of the M.S.S.C., 1879, p. 10. The Cup and its race was placed under the auspices of the M.S.S.C. Unlike major championship cups in modern sports, some of these elaborate and expensive trophies became the property of the first racer to win the designated event twice. Thus, new trophies needed to be given and seemed to materialize.



Snowshoe hurdle race circa 1900. Source: M.A.A.A. Souvenir of the New Club House, 1905.

tramping was regarded as the backbone, the *raison d'être* of the sport and it achieved its own reputation through other means. In effect, tramping became standardized in many ways although less formally than its racing counterpart. Racing fostered individual meritocracy under auspices of host clubs, but the club environment was also promoted through tramping. The perceived significance attached to tramping was underlined in 1868 by M.S.S.C. officers who sought to:

impress upon members the necessity of giving strict attendance to the weekly musters, and evincing in all matters pertaining to its interests the strong conservative club influence that more than anything else tends to exact general respect.⁸¹

Races after 1868 became the prestigious, competitive form of the sport while tramping waned as the stable mass participation, recreational aspect of snowshoeing. New features were added to tramping in efforts to infuse more prominence to the outings. In 1869, M.S.S.C. leadership and initiative were exemplified by the adoption of distinctive club colors using tuques with tassels.

81. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1868, p. 109. Discrimination against Indians, one assumes, was normative and, therefore, a conservative influence.

The idea was to make the M.S.S.C. distinguished in its tramping activities and the concept caught the imagination of members of all clubs. The "Tuque bleue" became the recognized cognomen of the M.S.S.C. while other clubs selected cap colours to become Tuque Verte, Tuque Brune and so forth. Similarly, in the early 1870s blanket coats, heretofore plain white or off-white, were transformed into club uniforms with the acceptance of club colours. The M.S.S.C. selected the imperialistic red, white and blue and gave exact specifications for width measurements for ribbons in these colors to be fitted to the coats. Appropriately capped and ribboned, the trampers also sported their annual club membership badges sewn onto the front of the coats; the more badges, the more revered was the member. By 1874, full uniform was expected of even new members on every M.S.S.C. tramp.⁸² Well established clubs had fixture cards printed at the start of the tramping season and sent to each club member. Weekly advertisements in the Montreal press of the 1870s served as reminders for the musters. All of these steps were taken to bolster tramping.

Even the trend toward racing was embraced and given its place in cross country snowshoeing. The inauguration of the first mountain steeplechase in the season of 1869 by the M.S.S.C.⁸³ was an obvious maneuver to marry the cross country skills of the activity to the competitive urge to race. It proved to be a good tactic for bringing respect to tramping since the annual steeplechases became popular during the 1870s. Spectators would "drive" in sleighs to observe the start and then drive to the destination to witness the finish. Defying gravity over the steep heights of Mount Royal took its toll; the first reports of "stitches" occurred in the annual steeplechase event.⁸⁴ Yet by the late 1880s, steeplechasing over the mountain waned as a competitive event. Steeplechases were discontinued coincident with the general demise of Montreal snowshoeing. For almost thirty years, steeplechasing brought competitive respectability to tramping and helped to boost the popularity of snowshoe outings. In 1876, Becket boasted, Mount Royal was busy every night of the week, except Sunday, with snowshoe groups wending their way to different hotels and resting spots.⁸⁵ These were the romanticized "charcoal and moonlight" nights of snowshoe tramping and strolling in Montreal.

82. The exact year of the adoption of club colours is unknown. There were no club colours indicated in the by-laws and constitution of the M.S.S.C. in 1871, but there were colours listed in the by-laws of 1875. Width specifications were listed in the M.S.S.C. Minute Book 1884, n.p. The coats could be purchased complete with scarlet trim around the bottom edge and epaulets in blue, white and red stripes at Gardner's or Lanes' stores. The badges were cloth ribbons of white or red, prior to the mid 1870s, and they carried the club insignia of crossed snowshoes surrounded by the letters M.S.S.C. and the year the badge was issued. After 1875, the badges were red, white and blue, significant symbols of imperialism.

83. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 157. The first steeplechase or cross country race was a green or novice race up and across Mount Royal on January 16, 1869. One week later a championship mountain steeplechase was contested for the Duclos medal, named for the proprietor of the hotel where the steeplechase ended. *Ibid.*, p. 158. No artificial barriers were constructed over the approximately three mile course. Turns were marked with coloured flags along the course. Typical of the vanity of the M.S.S.C., its contest was often labelled in the press as the "Montreal Grand National Steeplechase."

84. Maltby caught a stitch in a steeplechase challenge over the mountain in 1869. *Ibid.*, p. 159. To this day, exercise physiologists can only speculate at the precise cause of stitches in endurance events. Stitches are attributed to liver disfunction, glycogen depletion, diaphragm fatigue and even gas in the intestines.

85. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 312.



A snowshoe tramp in blanket coat and tугue garb of snowshoers in the 1870s and 1880s. Source: A 19th Century painting in the possession of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association.

Steeplechasing was a significant innovation of the snowshoe clubs. It became almost an initiation rite for novice snowshoers to enter a steeplechase event.⁸⁶ Yet much more important than the steeplechases in fostering snowshoeing was the transformation of its adherents from participants in charcoal and moonlight night activities to knights of snowshoeing. During the 1870s, snowshoeing, became an ethic, symbolic of right values, moral purity and all that was right and good for society. This ethos of snowshoeing was established by design and carefully developed into a public image by the M.S.S.C. in particular and, following suit, by Montreal snowshoe clubs in general.

Manliness and character were equated with snowshoeing from its inception. Only men and boys were allowed to race. Women, snowshoers proclaimed, could only aspire to marry a snowshoe man. Even when women were able to enjoy romantic strolls (never the tramps) during the 1870s, the M.S.S.C. still hailed the sport as “the manly pastime of snowshoeing” and made “manly efforts to make our Club the first, and our Races the best contested.” Speeches at annual dinners repeatedly referred to the moral-bearing, independence and manliness of snowshoeing. It was announced proudly, and probably very convincingly that “snowshoeing and dissipation are mortal and perpetual enemies.”⁸⁷ Similarly, such paramilitary aspects of snowshoeing as the discipline it demanded, the uniforms it required, the single-file tramping conven-

86. This rite of passage was known as earning one’s “maiden spurs.” M.S.S.C. Minute Book, p. 120. Sexist values and attributes were probably shaped as much through sport as any other societal institution.

87. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1877, n.p. The connotation of dissipation here was frivolous or wasted activity.

tions it dictated, the medals and badges that were won and worn, were reinforcements of the manly sport of snowshoeing. The blackball voting system,⁸⁸ inaugurated in the mid 1860s for proposed new members, was in reality a filtering agent to ensure that the "right" kind of men were admitted to the clubs. Clearly, the snowshoeing fraternity was carefully contrived.

In a direct move to cement the "good" image, the M.S.S.C. in the mid 1870s adopted prohibition for all of its social gatherings.⁸⁹ Liquor and wine had always been forbidden; from this point in time, even malt beer was banished. Annual dinners became very noble and elaborate affairs. Visiting dignitaries to Montreal, naval commanders, consuls-general and governors-general, were often invited to these dinners. Alcoholic abstinence was observed and formal dinner brochures were published with the complete bill of fare and the tributary toasts to the Queen, the armed services, the Prince and Princess of Wales, stewards and guests, "our" winter sports, the ladies and the press.⁹⁰ Without question, the M.S.S.C. polished its public image.

Ladies were only partially integrated into snowshoeing circles. Women were cherished by the knights for their spectatorial glamour and, presumably, for their perceived inspiration to improve performances at races. But ladies were not invited or allowed to attend any part of the tramping activities, especially those indulged in at the hotels, until the first "ladies night" in 1884. Thereafter, prompted by the social atmosphere engendered by winter carnivals and concerts, one evening per year was designated as ladies' night. Prior to the inclusion of ladies in the mid 1880s, toasts and speeches were made in praise of everything from snowshoeing to the Queen, songs were rendered in English and French, and some clubs even hired a piano player. The irony of these all-male events was the dance that occurred:

a little terpsichorean exercise was indulged in, those representing the fair sex doffing their blanket coats⁹¹

Cotillions were the most common of these saltatory adventures at the mountain hotels, but the pretense of female representatives was always deliberate:

Dancing the cotillion, etc., concluded by an imitation of Mdme. Nilsson in true operatic style by Mr. Baker, whose falsetto beats everything ever heard, the manner in which he sustains high notes with crescendo and diminuendo being marvelous.⁹²

From all accounts, the atmosphere was one of pure fun with make-believe females. Manliness in snowshoeing prior to the 1880s meant male exclusivity

88. From all evidence, the M.S.S.C. initiated this screening system wherein one negative vote in ten was sufficient to prohibit membership to a proposed candidate. Other clubs may have followed suit; the system was adopted by the M.A.A.A. from its inception in 1881.

89. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 319.

90. To underline the polished temperance image cultivated by the M.S.S.C., the beverage listings for the M.S.S.C. annual dinner in 1877 were tea, ginger ale, coffee and lemonade. By contrast, at the annual dinner of the Montreal Lacrosse Club in the same year, ale, sherry, claret and ginger ale were served. Considering the amalgamation of these two clubs into the "associated clubs" in that year, the prohibition restrictions of the M.S.S.C. are all the more significant.

91. M.S.S.C. Minute Books, 1874, 1875 and 1879; Annual Report of the M.S.S.C., 1884, p. 41.

92. *Montreal Star*, December 21, 1882.

but with a twist of almost bizarre, female-imitative behaviour. In active snowshoeing, women engaged in “strolls” with small groups of snowshoers but they never tramped or raced.

There were other behaviour patterns that became part of the ethos and traditions of snowshoeing. New members or guests on social occasions were set in a blanket held by a circle of snowshoers and tossed or bounced into the air. It was part of the snowshoeing code of behaviour, a trait unique to the knights. British imperialism was the most obvious component of the snowshoers’ creed and was reflective of the special ethos of the sport. British royalty or any persons representing the crown were accorded highest honours at race meetings at the awards ceremony and at social affairs. The Prince of Wales consented to be named an honorary life member of the M.S.S.C. in 1870, a sign of considerable distinction for that club. Perhaps the most elaborate and conspicuous example of the imperialistic sentiment and respect for royalty was the “Snowshoers’ Arch” built at the corner of Dorchester Street and Beaver Hall Hill on the occasion of the arrival of His Excellency, The Marquis of Lorne, and Her Royal Highness, Princess Louise, to Canada in 1878. Featured on the front page of the *London Graphic*, the arch displayed ten dozen lacrosse sticks and six dozen snowshoes and was suspended across the street to enable the royal party to drive beneath it. The structure was illuminated at night by two hundred chinese lanterns.⁹³



A moonlight social outing of male and female snowshoers circa late 1870s. Source: M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1873-1878.

93. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, press clippings, including the *London Graphic*, 1878, n.p. The arch was

The arch was a showcase of British loyalty and it was significant that sport was used as the vehicle of royal welcome. Snowshoers' songs in the 1870s displayed the same British fervor. For example:

To represent our Gracious Queen,
Lord Dufferin came and won our hearts,
Her loyal subjects long we've been,
And from her do not wish to part.
If England ever fears to lose
So bright a jewel from her crown,
She a better guardian cannot choose
Than the rattling boy from the County Down.⁹⁴

Indirectly, the snowshoers' embrace of all things British was shown through satirization of the French language in M.S.S.C. songs. In "Tramp to the Sault:"

Von blanket coat come to mine ouse
Und said he was von snow shoe man,
He toldt me to put on mine blouse
Und came out for a little fun
Chorus:
Come, Brudders dear hold me up, quick,
I am played out, put I'm not trunk,
O took me home I'm very sick,
Und but me of my leetle bunk.⁹⁵

Even though there were different French Canadian snowshoe clubs in existence at various times over the nineteenth century as well as excellent French Canadian racers and a snowshoe or raquette heritage dating from the *coureurs de bois*, such songs were composed in pompous ridicule of both a non-English language and the snowshoeing ineptness attributed to French Canadians. In "Dot Sky Plue Tuque" the verses were sung in between lengthy spoken passages using the same false French and quasi-German dialect:

Chorus-Always dripping and valling in der shnow,
Nine dimes in efery mile, headfirst in dot shnow pile,
Always dripping and valling on my shnoot,
Hurrah for der poys dot veare that sky plue tuque.⁹⁶

The strong British loyalty that helped to shape the snowshoeing spirit or ethos during the 1870s is encapsulated in the sport of a speech by the M.S.S.C.'s C. P. Davidson in 1878:

That in England's heroes of past days, were found those who had been in their School and College life, first in Cricket, first on the River and always in the thick of the football scrimmage. He [Davidson] had no doubt it would be so with the Lacrosse and Snow Shoe men of the Dominion, should they at any time be called upon to defend that Empire whose integrity was their pride.⁹⁷

designed by the architectural firm of Hutchison and Steele, an indicator of the organizational acumen and civic support behind the carnivals.

94. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 244.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 349-350. When the French Canadian Charles Lamothe won the first Worthington Cup in 1879, the press referred to him as "un enfant du sol." M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1879, n.p., press clipping.

97. Becket, *Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, p. 370, brackets mine.

The period from the late 1860s to the early 1870s in Montreal witnessed demonstrable growth in the numbers of snowshoe participants and clubs and a growing spectatorial interest in snowshoe races. Gambling was the key reason for the popularity of and enthusiasm for racing. Reinforced by betting interests, racing events became standardized in format, racing conditions were improved and concerted training became normative behaviour among racers in quest of victories within public spectacle. Evidence of refined strategy and techniques (the brush, pacing) was clear, racing times improved in all events and racism toward Indian competitors was an accepted and practised feature among white snowshoe enthusiasts. Snowshoe racing by the mid 1870s became a distinct, competitive sport. The establishment of the laws of snowshoe racing in 1878 was as comparably significant as the formation of team sports leagues. The laws singlehandedly brought a strong measure of sophistication and accepted organization to the competitive aspects of snowshoeing. Instead of ad hoc decision-making at individual club racing events, the laws imposed structure on all races. This institutionalization of the rules both capped the existing, understood racing regulations and standardized the sport for spectators, participants and future developments. The values of manliness, moral propriety, temperance, imperialism, special traditions (the bounce and dancing) and the whole snowshoeing ethic were not confined merely to the participants of the various aspects of the sport. The races were spectacles of athletic prowess before the public, heavily contested for the honour of the various clubs as well as for the demonstration of individual prowess. But the values and traditions of snowshoeing were carried even more dynamically to the society-at-large and to the world through two innovations established by the adherents of the sport, snowshoe concerts of the 1870s and 1880s and the internationally renowned Montreal winter carnivals of the 1880s.

III

The concerts established and staged by members of the M.S.S.C. were a compact display of snowshoeing traditions and the ethos and image that had been built around the sport. At different times in its history the M.S.S.C. had donated surplus funds to charity organizations and other worthy causes.⁹⁸ Such benevolence was not publicized, but it reflected the moral propriety self-perceived by snowshoers in the M.S.S.C. The concert concept arose in November, 1873, when the club decided to put on a public exhibition of "our best snow shoe songs" with the proceeds to go to a charitable hospital. Songs were a feature of both social gatherings at the hotels and the tramps themselves, but were not public before this time. The organist of Christ Church Cathedral agreed to act as the choral leader for the first concert and M.S.S.C. members practiced assiduously. The gala was presented in the Queen's Hall on February

98. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1861-1870, and Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 62-180. For example, in 1862, the M.S.S.C. bank balance of sixty dollars was donated to the Lancashire Relief Fund. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1862. p. 17.

17, 1874 before a full house. Dressed in full tramping uniform, M.S.S.C. members presented seventeen musical numbers that included solos, duets, full choruses, reading selections from S. Lover and Mark Twain, comic solos and a piano solo, most of which were based on snowshoe themes.⁹⁹ It was a tremendous success and publicity gushed with such tributes as:

[Snowshoers] are more than a mere combination of muscular Christians, whose love of vigorous exercise absorbs their entire leisure.¹⁰⁰

So popular was the event with Montreal citizens that requests for a repeat performance were answered with one in the Mechanics' Hall at the end of March. For both concerts, the stage and stage walls were bedecked with crossed snowshoes, trophies, cups, medals, race prizes, the prestigious Claxton flags (emblematic of lacrosse supremacy), blue tuques and large banners with engraved club mottoes.¹⁰¹ The causes were worthy and commendable, but the real effects on snowshoeing were derived from the animated promotion and advertisement of the sport derived from displays. It was an inside look, even an embellished perspective, on the nature of the traditions of snowshoeing that had not been previously available to the public.

The following season was a banner year for the M.S.S.C.'s popularity. The



The Snowshoers' Halt on Mount Royal 1889. Note the torches and distinctive blanket coats. Source: *Dominion Illustrated Monthly*, 1889.

99. M.S.S.C. Minute Book, 1874, press clippings. Over one hundred dollars was raised for the Montreal General Hospital. Tramping and racing were second priorities to practises held over Messrs. Gould and Hill's Piano Warerooms. Even the ushers wore club uniforms at the concerts.

100. Ibid., brackets mine.

101. Montreal newspapers pointed out that "it is known that the M.S.S.C. possesses prizes worth over \$5000 in the aggregate." Ibid. One of the club mottoes was: "Health and Strength are Wealth."

A Study of the Evolution of Sport in Nineteenth Century Montreal

Montreal press carried the whole annual report of the club in the newspaper and the membership swelled to 250 with heavy attendance at the tramps. At one outing of the M.S.S.C.:

So long was the string that some one remarked that the leader would be at the Pines before the whipper-in took a step.¹⁰²

Long cross country tramps were revitalized, compass-in-hand,¹⁰³ as the concert reputation of the M.S.S.C. expanded. Between 1875 and 1880, the M.S.S.C. put on another seven major concerts. Proceeds ranging from eighty to three hundred dollars from all but one of the concerts went to charity, in aid of the poor, or, to a hospital or church fund. The snowshoers/performers were billeted in out-of-town locations and some of the concert productions, such as the one in St. Andrews in 1876, were followed by balls. The concert in 1880 at the Academy of Music in Montreal, featured world champion Canadian oarsman Edward Hanlan sitting in his shell on stage pretending to row before a standing ovation of the audience.¹⁰⁴ The charitable motives behind the concerts were legitimate and the attendant publicity served to spotlight snowshoeing. The Montreal press bubbled in reporting every concert and even the local papers gave full pages to them.¹⁰⁵ On January 25, 1879, the *Canadian Illustrated News* carried six full pages of sketches, pictures and text on various aspects of the M.S.S.C. with special emphasis on the steeplechases and concerts. Clearly the concerts were catalysts in the development and public promotion of snowshoeing. The image constantly projected by the different aspects of the programs was one of the virtue of the sport and its devotees.

Snowshoe clubs were established from Manitoba to Newfoundland by 1881.¹⁰⁶ The nature and traditions of the racing and tramping aspects of the sport had been established under the leadership of the M.S.S.C. in Montreal, which city remained the acknowledged center of the sport. The M.S.S.C. parent club had combined resources in the same year with the Montreal Lacrosse Club and the Montreal Bicycle Club to form the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association. The traditions and sporting practices established by the M.S.S.C. were adopted by the multi-sport M.A.A.A., the leading club in the organization and development of late 19th and early 20th century Canadian sport.¹⁰⁷ The M.S.S.C. was confident that M.A.A.A. facilities

cannot fail to make it the most popular resort of our young men, and within the walls of which they will be safe from the sins and temptations that beset the lives of those who dwell in cities.¹⁰⁸

102. Ibid.. 1875, n.p.

103. If the leader forgot his compass, trampers were vexed when bearings were lost and the return trip was prolonged, especially at night. Angus Grant, one of the founding members of the M.A.A.A., was constantly chided for forgetting his compass; he relied for direction and safety on his famous "search dog." Monday, a black terrier or Otter dog who accompanied the trampers of the M.S.S.C. for years until "some unfeeling wretch" poisoned him in 1878. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*. p. 384.

104. Annual Report of the M.S.S.C., 1880, p. 9. and Bucket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 430-431.

105. For example. *The Cornwall Reporter*, February 9, 1878, in M.S.S.C. Minute Book. 1878, n.p., press clipping. A full, accompanying page of sketches appeared in the *Reporter* after the write-up on the concert.

106. Becket, *The Montreal Snow Shoe Club*, pp. 491-508.

107. Morrow, "The Powerhouse of Canadian Sport," pp. 20-39.

108. Annual Report of the M.S.S.C., 1881. p. 8.

Ironically, amalgamation into the M.A.A.A. masked the beginning of the end of snowshoeing as a sport in nineteenth century Montreal. The concerts and social activities of the M.S.S.C. brought popularity and growth in the 1870s, but its emphasis was becoming more social. More and more members on the tramps were driving to hotels in sleighs rather than snowshoeing. The dignity and prestige of the annual dinners were more important, it seemed, than actual participation on snowshoes. A last grand tribute to the sport, temporarily masking its decline, was the winter carnivals held annually between 1883 and 1889 in Montreal.

The idea of staging a winter week or winter sports festival originated in 1882 with R. D. McGibbon, vice-president of the M.S.S.C.¹⁰⁹ One year later, the plan came to fruition with sporting clubs from across the city working together to organize the week-long "mardis-gras" of winter sport in late January. Leadership was provided for the first three winter carnivals by the M.S.S.C. Each year enormous ice castles or ice palaces were built on Dominion square. The ice palace in 1884 was constructed of 10,000 blocks of ice, each about forty by twenty inches in size, at a cost to the city of \$3,200.¹¹⁰ Citizens were always welcome to roam its walls, turrets and porticos. The grand finale of the week was the "attack" on the ice palace at night by a parade of 1600 snowshoers from ten or fifteen of the city's clubs. Each member carried a torchlight and some Roman candles or Bengal lights supplied by local businesses in a procession that started on Mount Royal and ended in a spectacular fireworks display at the castle before thousands of interested viewers. So popular were the first two carnivals and so complex the organization of the festival, that the 1885 carnival was divided into two administrative groups, the East end and the West end committees. The East end was French Canadian; rather than an ice-palace, this committee built a "condora," a circular, clear ice structure that was sixty feet at its base and rose to an apex at ninety feet and was crowned with a snowshoer carved with ice.¹¹¹

During the celebrations each year, the week was given over to mass participation as well as to elite competitions in snowshoe racing, steeplechases, tobogganing, skating (and attendant "fancy dress" skating parties), curling, carnival "drives" or parades in fancy sleighs or "cars" (and floats) and parties galore. Events were packed and even the steeplechase routes were lined with spectators. Snowshoeing was the acknowledged senior sport in the affairs. On February 6, 1884, the *Montreal Daily Star* ran four full pages crammed with snowshoeing history, songs, nuances, individual club characteristics and details of the carnivals. Tourists were attracted from around the world. Inside the walls of the ice castles and palaces were extensive displays of agriculture and other products of the Dominion. All winter sports were promoted and de-

109. *Montreal Gazette*, February 13, 1882. McGibbon announced the concept at the annual dinner of the M.S.S.C.

110. *Montreal Star*, December 15, 1883.

111. *Ibid.* The architects for the original ice castles were the same firm that had designed the "Snowshoers' Arch" in 1878.

veloped as a direct result of the carnivals. Snowshoeing was fanned into glorious flames by the popularity attached to the carnivals, and then consumed by its own fire. Even during the carnivals, newspaper reports provided an overwhelming impression of the social impact rather than the athletic significance of winter sports.

By 1885 there were 1000 members in the M.S.S.C. alone and there were some twenty-five thriving snowshoe clubs in the city. One year later, the hotels were abandoned in favour of an Athletic Club House, a permanent structure on Mount Royal that was rented and used exclusively by snowshoe clubs for the next decade.¹¹² Most members, however, were lured to the race courses as spectators and attracted to the Athletic Club House for the social benefits. Although the concert concept was revived twice in 1888, participant attraction to snowshoeing was dwindling to walking in small groups. Racing flourished and expanded too rapidly, engendered by the Merchants' Cup given in 1884 by Montreal merchants for an annual five event competition each year. It was the first sign of commercial encouragement for snowshoe races and was prompted, likely, by the success and tourist dollar benefits of the first two carnivals. By 1887 there were too many races, one every week-end. The inimitable sports promoter, Richard K. Fox of New York offered in vain awards for a series of five



The Ice Palace, Montreal Winter Carnival 1886. Source: *Dominion Illustrated Monthly*, 1889.

112. Annual Reports of the M.S.S.C., 1886-1897. The club house succeeded Lumkin's and Prendergast's hotels.

mile races for the unsanctioned "championship of Canada."¹¹³ To relieve a snowshoe race-saturated public, city clubs tried to consolidate race meetings to two major race events per season. It was too late to halt a dramatic decline in public interest. Tobogganing¹¹⁴ and an old snowshoeing nemesis, ice-skating and its rapidly emerging derivative, ice-hockey, popularized by the carnivals, captured public interest more fervently than walking or racing on "three feet long sieves." The decline of the sport of snowshoeing in the late 1880s and early 1890s was as rapid as its expansion had been in the late 1860s. Even the M.A.A.A. reflected the public shift in taste toward ice skating when it constructed a huge outdoor ice rink in 1891. Some members of the M.S.S.C. had been playing challenge hockey matches with other snowshoe clubs' members since the early 1880s. Between 1894 and 1901, the M.S.S.C. tried to capitalize on skating's popularity by holding annual snowshoe races in combination with the skating races.¹¹⁵ The first Canadian snowshoe "championships," held in Quebec City in 1894, attracted little interest or publicity against the back-drop of a decided shift in interest toward team sports.¹¹⁶ The jubilee celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the M.S.S.C. in 1890 were filled, fittingly, with reminiscences and nostalgia of the old tramping and racing days; days long gone.¹¹⁷

IV

The study of the sport of snowshoeing in Montreal provides considerable insight into a single sport development during the last half of the nineteenth century. Significant transition points and influential factors were identified and analyzed in tracing the funnelling process of snowshoeing from a social, participatory activity through its competitive focus to its ultimate decline as a significant anglophone sport in Montreal. During its first phase of development, from the 1840s to 1866, snowshoeing was confined to a very small group of privileged businessmen. The formation of the first clubs in the city led to the identification of two separate, but interrelated components of snowshoeing, namely, tramping and competitive racing. Growth was limited during this period and was restrained by the social conditions in Montreal during the American civil war years. At the same time, the prevalence of garrisoned personnel and the military milieu during these years interacted with snowshoe-

113. Ibid., 1886, p. 59.

114. Tobogganing was not mere sliding down the best hills in the area. During the 1880s, six or seven toboggan clubs were formed, such as the Tuque Bleue Toboggan Club in 1884, and these clubs built long iced and banked chutes out of wooden frames for toboggan runs.

115. Annual Reports of the M.S.S.C., 1894-1901.

116. The Canadian Snowshoe Union was formed in 1907. Seven years later, the Winnipeg Snow Shoe Club, originally formed by an ex-M.S.S.C. member, hosted the "world" championships in snowshoeing. Between the two world wars, track and field athletes used snowshoes as winter tramping devices. Unpublished research suggests snowshoeing thrived as a French Canadian supported sport during the 1920s and 1930s.

117. Annual Report of the M.S.S.C., 1890, pp. 65-70. In 1892, Samuel Baylis wrote a delightful story, "How Jack Won His Snowshoes," in the *Dominion Illustrated Monthly* (March, 1892): 124-128. It was a bedtime story for children about a young boy, Jack, and the honour he achieved by winning a pair of snowshoes at the annual snowshoe races of the M.S.S.C. It was romance that was out of date as soon as it was published.

ing's development to build paramilitaristic elements of discipline and concerted training into tramping and racing.

From the mid 1860s until the late 1870s snowshoeing was distinctively channelled toward organized, competitive industrial-era sport. Snowshoeing's boom period coincided with and benefitted from the rage for lacrosse and competed with ice skating for public popularity. These symbiotic factors, however, were outweighed by more directly influential variables. A pronounced emphasis on wagering and the codification of racing laws or rules brought standardization to the sport and consequently a decided shift to competitive racing over snowshoeing's more social, recreational aspect, tramping, that was its primary form prior to 1865. Racial discrimination against Indians on the basis of perceived social inferiority and innate skill in snowshoeing was strongly and consistently practiced by the predominantly white anglophone snowshoeing clubs in Montreal.

Leadership was vested in and embraced by the Montreal Snow Shoe Club. The M.S.S.C. established the precedents and patterns that were structured into racing formats, regulations, laws, unique uniforms and especially snowshoeing's special trademark, its ethos or creed. In the latter regard, all the values of moral propriety, manliness, temperance, discrimination (against Indians, French Canadians and to a certain extent, women), and paramilitary discipline were assimilated in the behaviour, the songs, the concerts and the winter carnivals established by the M.S.S.C. and its followers. Snowshoeing behaviour was standardized, institutionalized and ritualized (especially in the living tableaux of concerts) by the late 1870s.

During its final phase of development between 1880 and 1895, the traditions and patterns constructed in Montreal snowshoeing were perpetuated by the concerts and the popularized civic winter carnivals. In reality the winter carnivals concealed the process of decline of snowshoeing. The anglophone-based sport did not withstand the shifts in public popularity to ice skating, which replaced the recreational, tramping component of snowshoeing, and ice hockey, which replaced the competitive, racing aspect of snowshoeing. In many ways, snowshoeing was the sport of an earlier era that did not completely make the transition to modern, industrial sport. It was an individualistic sport that could not be adapted in an era moving faster and faster toward commercial-based team sports. The lack of formation of a sport governing body was a significant deterrent to the perpetuation of snowshoeing. Pedestrianism, snowshoeing's summer counterpart, succumbed to the same inevitable decline. Both sports were extremely physically taxing sports that could no longer attract adherents in highly industrialized urban environments that catered to new, escalating interests in team sports.

It is difficult to draw general conclusions from specific sport studies. This study has examined the particularistic changes in snowshoeing over a fifty year period in Montreal. The process of change is at the heart of the study of sport history. In this case, evolution of snowshoeing was found to be constructed and shaped by a very small group of people congregated into a powerful club, the

M.S.S.C. External societal factors and intrinsic initiatives taken by the snow-shoers themselves combined to direct the changes in the sport. Overall this study underlines the forces in sporting development that funnel sport from social, recreational roots to seemingly inevitable behaviours associated with competitive, organized sport.